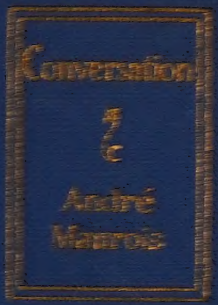
Conversation
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CONVERSATION

In the same happy vein is written:

L'Amour, or The Art of Love,

by PAUL GERALDY

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CONVERSATION

By

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

Translated
From the French
By

YVONNE DUFOUR

New York
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CONVERSATION

CONVERSATION

Sentimental Conversation

WHAT we call charm is a mixture of coquetry and naturalness, at once disquieting and reassuring. It brings to one's feelings the same ease that gracefulness does to one's movements.

One does not love a woman for what she says; one loves what she says because one loves her.

There are friendships and loves whose tone has been set too high. They never make us very happy. Naturalness is the true sustainer of happiness.

CONVERSATION

Conversation in a happy marriage is familiar, banal, savoury, such as those dishes made up of simple ingredients which we prefer to the rarest delicacies.

Much tolerance is required of husband and wife to make one bearable to the other in public. Each finds the other affected and inaccurate. Anecdotes and feelings alike seem distorted through a desire to please or a fear to shock. A public personage appears in quite a different light from that of his intimate and domestic life. This loosening of restraint is irritating to an impatient affection. But true affection, though it, too, realizes that pictures as drawn do not coincide, under-

stands, smiles, and loves all the better for it.

Certain women, born vivacious and charming, become colorless in a few months because of an unappreciative husband. Their thoughts are so belittled that they lose faith in themselves. And so they grow shy, suspicious, with a whipped-dog look. Their first lover will need much tact to restore their self-confidence.

A man may worship his mistress and yet fear what she may say in public. He realizes that he alone understands her.

A man and woman who love one an-

other and have long been separated, and who meet after such an absence, find it somewhat difficult to recover the tone and manner of their former talks. A certain temperature is needed to bring about the blending of feelings, and it would seem that such conversation, when resumed, must in a few moments travel through all the preceding stages of love, just as the embryo in a few days recreates the full history of living beings.

Certain men, and especially certain husbands, have a way of discarding women's talk. This, women resent, and rightly so. It is true that because of an awkward vocabulary their deepest

thoughts sometimes appear silly or banal. But all such thoughts need is to be transposed into human language.

Our pleasures are indirect and we enjoy only signs of them. Madame de Sévigné used to feel her heart beat if anyone mentioned in her presence the town of Aix where her daughter was staying.

Men lie unnaturally. Women who excel in the art detect in their loved ones the least trace of a falsehood. There is in the tone of a guilty man something deliberate which stresses his lack of naturalness through the very excess of that quality.

The most astonishing memory is that of a woman in love.

One can reconstitute a woman's lovers by observing her vocabulary, just as Cuvier who, guided by a few bones, would draw unknown monsters.

A man prefers in his mistress mediocre thoughts which are her own, to deep thoughts which may come from another.

The most insignificant being can be loved if he knows how to play the game of uncertainty.

Often, when men and women talk, a jesting tone is used only to disguise intensity of desire. It would seem that,

conscious of the force which carries them on and of the danger which threatens them, they endeavor to protect their peace through the feigned indifference of their speech. So it is that all witticisms are an innuendo, all sentences a sounding-line, all compliments a caress. So it is that speech and feelings are as gliding upon two superposed planes, and the upper plane, where words flit by, is but the symbol of the lower plane where confused pictures move.

When love is born lovers speak of the future. When love dies they speak of the past.

How beautiful is conversation when

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brightened by love! The most commonplace words acquire sudden radiance, as do mere fruit or vegetables in the light of Venice.

I like this saying from Stevenson: "There are but three subjects of conversation: I am I, you are you, and others are strangers."

All beings are swathed in veils of mysterious vapours. The pleasure of intimacy lies in the lifting of such veils, and seeing behind them the real contour of the mind. Love demands that the mystery be dispelled, yet it wants it to remain too. Bright sunshine is boring and puts one to sleep.

CONVERSATION

The certainty of being loved brings much grace to a shy mind through the restoring of its naturalness.

After a long and happy relationship the intimacy of lovers is such that each imagines the thoughts of the other. A man will stroll among the thoughts of his loved one with pleasant assurance, just as he likes, every night, to take the same walk around his garden.

Confidences

DESIRE is born of casual physical contact; confidences of the contact of two sensibilities. One is no more sufficient to create love than the other intimacy.

Until two persons have found within each other the slumbering well of remembrances, their talk is dry and languishing. But once the sounding-line has gone deep enough, secrets come out as a gushing spring. Nothing is more delightful than to perceive in a conversation arid until then, the still invisible rise of this freshness.

CONVERSATION

The most secretive of men are given to confidences, but this under the form of general ideas. They believe themselves safe behind such a mask. Even I . . . as I write this . . .

Advice is always a confession.

It may seem prudent in friendship, as in a boat, to have a system of water-tight compartments. Yet should the secrets of all of one's friends be stowed away into one hold of the ship, the wreck of a single affection may cause the sinking of one's existence.

Much wit is needed to be discreet. Boredom, through the very feeling of

emptiness which it gives, creates something like an irresistible air current which brings up from the depths of the soul the secrets we wished to keep there.

One might well believe that mutual confidences are in themselves a safeguard against indiscretion. Yet such is not the case. Men think that their own affairs are so different from those of others, that they find it natural to betray while they hope to be served.

We either hate or love the recipient of our confidences. We find that he was either worthy or unworthy of them; that they are becoming or unbecoming to him.

Horace is wrong. It is in misfortune that you will find many friends. To be the confidant of happiness requires rarer virtues.

A confidant always brings you back to the subject of your misfortunes; he must complete his album. Collectors of secrets have their empty boxes the same as stamp collectors.

There are connected with discretion pleasures which should make it an easy virtue.

One of the hardships of illness, said Madame du Deffand, is that one becomes a prey to all fools who, knowing not what

to do, bring one their boredom and call it charity.

It is a marked sign of kindness to know how to forget other people's remembrances.

The danger of confidences lies in that they often create their object. As certain very pure women look for sins to tell their confessor, so quiet and resigned souls are drawn to despair by a tortured confidant.

Confidences are naturally becoming to unhappiness. The latter reveals a kinship of soul unknown until then.

Some women ask a friend to keep a

secret only that certain news may spread the more.

The novelist is the only man who can afford to be discreet without suffering. His secrets walk out garbed in dominos.

There is keen pleasure in finding oneself the recipient of several confidences on the same subject. Thus one obtains crossed views on various aspects. But especially does one experience true satisfaction when the sharp end of a secret penetrating into the hollow of another, wholly completes the pattern.

Women, when together, gladly pretend a sort of comradeship and a confidential

tone which they do not assume immediately with men. But beneath this seeming friendship, what watchful mistrust, and how justified it is!

The voice of a man, when he reads, reveals not what he is, but what he wants to be. It is the voice of the personage whom he visualizes when he thinks of himself.

Slander

ONE is afraid to be kindly lest one should be boring, but that is a mistake—one would be original.

Every man knows that others are mistaken in their judgment of him, but not that he is mistaken in his judgment of others.

If we knew others as we know ourselves their most condemnable acts would seem to us to deserve indulgence.

Provincial, and of an austere family, the first conversations which I heard in Paris terrified me. Guests at a dinner were

amused with scandalous anecdotes about every man and every woman. It seemed to me that their accusations were unkind and unfounded. I felt that to be the subject of chatter of this type must be the most terrible adventure. As we grow older we observe that the universal nature of such slander takes away much of its weight. When it is false it is soon forgotten, and real character always asserts itself. When it is true, it hardly changes the friendship we may have for its victims, or our manner in greeting them. Society chastizes only those vices which may destroy it. The world, which thrives on conversation, could not very well be against those who sustain it.

CONVERSATION

Henry James, a great psychologist and a serious man, loved above all, gossip. "It is through it only," he said, "that we learn about man."

We should make it a rule never to repeat unkind talk without verifying its substance. We would have nothing more to say.

Any talk will be repeated. The man to whom you have just spoken ill of a woman will marry her tomorrow and close his home to you.

A . . . who, by nature, seems kindly and even indulgent, accepts with strange tolerance any slanderous statement about

B . . . That is because they both covet the same post.

There are men who through vanity praise their friends as they praise their furniture, their wives. "Cordiality," said Proust, "derives as much pleasure in over-rating as malice does in depreciating."

What men are slower to forgive is the evil they have spoken of you.

We almost always spread that calumny which has hurt us most by denying it to people who had never heard of it.

A woman does not wish her love affairs talked about. Yet she wants everybody to know that someone loves her.

Vanity, in certain women, is so much stronger than modesty that they would gladly confess missteps of which they are innocent.

It is always possible, upon analyzing, to discover low motives in the worthiest deeds, just as a faint trace of smothering gases can be found in the purest air. But it is the blending alone that counts.

One should not speak evil of people with whom one has just dined, within a radius of a hundred yards from their house.

It is almost always an astonishing experience to approach people to whom the

world attributes rather doubtful deeds, since our own impression is often so favorable. It may be that the world is mistaken and is quick to accept as a fact an ill-natured assumption, but it may be also because the censurable act has no true relation to character. The culprit himself, after such an act has been committed, disapproves of it and no longer understands how he did it. It may be as foreign to him as it is to the spectators. Or again he may perceive so clearly the chain of circumstances which has led him to take an amazing course that the latter in the end appears natural to him and, because of the ease with which it was carried out, makes us think that it is so. Thus a

meeting with the Man himself does away with our prejudices against the Personage.

To tell our friends the unpleasant things which others have said of them is but jealousy seeking shelter behind false kindliness.

Our efforts to atone for a "break" are more trying to the victim than the break itself.

Men so like to be talked about that a discussion of their faults delights them.

It is easy to recognize, through their volubility, those who stand in dread of an

unpleasant allusion. The moment conversation touches upon taboo subjects, a false animation betrays their anxiety, and their speech is as those empty trains which military commanders would order to move in exposed sectors to divert an anticipated attack.

Every person has sensitive points, sometimes unknown to himself. Whoever irritates one of such points arouses deep hatred. Often those painful regions are connected with secondary centers. We are astonished at the emotion caused by such and such banal words; but that is because they have travelled through a hidden road to one of the diseased parts of that mind.

Sincerity

A VAST setting of Nature is helpful to sincerity. There, the most astounding of human thoughts appear so small that we confess them.

Were a man to tell all of his thoughts, we would not believe him. Which would be right? What man is there who thinks all that he thinks?

It happens that, when with some people, we play a certain part. Through a sort of indolence we fall back into this part whenever such people appear, and they are right when they judge us as wholly different from what we are.

The danger of cynicism is that it makes meanness a virtue.

Sincerity consists less in saying all we think than in avoiding what, for that moment at least, we do not think.

Daniel Halévy said of certain confessions of Marcel Proust as an adolescent: "Too sincere to be so!"

All confessions strive for coherence which distorts them. Man is more complex than his logic.

In conversation, as in surgery, one must intervene only with caution. The incorrigibly sincere operate upon healthy

friendships and loves and thereby kill them.

The dangerous aspect of sincerity is that it ends by creating its object. If you say: "I am ambitious, I am jealous," you feel licensed to be so, and these vices, cloaked in the prestige of frankness, become glorified.

Sincerity must be used in moderation, even with our most intimate friends. To be too frank is to put into an opinion what may be simply ill temper; it is to risk losing a friend because of a poorly digested roast, a headache, a thunderstorm.

Nothing is more essential to a pleasant

interview than the certainty of mutual esteem. Each wants to remain faithful to the picture which the other has drawn, and so rises high above himself. Yet moderation is necessary. To rise above oneself can become a tiring acrobatic performance.

We like the frankness of those who love us. The frankness of others we call insolence.

There are men whose presence suddenly robs us of all moderation and justness of mind. Because we know them to be hostile, we go beyond our thoughts. We part from them, furious with ourselves,

and if we meet them again we are, as we recall our anger, prompted to further violence of feeling. We must avoid other meetings, or else prepare for such, firmly and thoughtfully.

In order to be natural we must see only those we love.

We can speak frankly of our faults only to those who acknowledge our qualities.

We learn rather late in life to admit that we do not know that which we do not know, that we have not read those books we have not read. But once we have made up our mind as to this, what a relief it is!

Respect almost always ends by offending him who inspires it.

There is an art in contradicting which is really the most adroit form of flattery.

To admit one's timidity is a sign of its disappearance.

A man must be held responsible for his writings, not for his utterances. We are carried on by the pleasure we find in a flow of eloquence which takes us beyond the point where words express a thought.

Passions rush behind words as loiterers behind ringleaders.

It is when we reveal and explain ourselves to others that we realize our ignorance on the subject, and find that we must build our house, room by room, while we take visitors through it.

Many lies involve more laziness than hypocrisy.

THE stranger, almost alone, is seated in a corner. It is in his honour that so many eminent people have gathered, but after glancing at the illustrious guest, they have withdrawn into small groups. They prefer known mediocrity to incommunicable greatness, and this man who, in his country, would be the center of an attentive crowd is here talking sadly with a child.

Both started a conversation other than they wished. Now they are powerless to stop it. Their sentences, like a train, pass before them noisily, and they—belated,

careless switchmen—watch it run on the wrong track, to sure disaster.

He is so afraid that he may not be the only one to speak that, if he pauses a moment, he puts out his hand, like a traffic officer, and halts in a respectful line words which were about to rush from other lips.

He came hoping to see her alone, and found two aunts and three cousins. He tries to be brave about it and to talk gayly; but she sees his suffering and feels at once mischievous and compassionate.

Seated beside the celebrated man whose books she has read, she tries in vain to

make him talk. She does not see, on her left, the unknown young man who would tell her such pretty things.

He sought this long conversation only to present his request, but he wanted to do it carelessly, as though by chance, and pretend to find pleasure in the rest of the interview. His tone has betrayed him; he is aware of it. Silence has followed the dangerous words, and his host, rather cool, knows now that the man before him is only soliciting a favor.

"Spinoza," says M . . . "I read over and over." And he quotes a beautiful phrase. You admire his memory, his culture. But

beware lest you meet him often. You would find that he lives on this phrase, a few more from Confucius, and a passage from St. Augustine. Men are easily astonished.

There are men whose conversation depends on the people who surround them, such as certain chemical reactions occur only in the presence of certain bodies. P . . . is brilliant only before his wife, who watches him. B . . . is charming only when Mrs. B . . . is far away. He is jealous.

It is easier to ask or to refuse over the telephone. The absence of the human face deprives imagination of all support.

Conversation on the telephone is halfway between art and life. We speak to the image we have formed of the listener.

It is easy to leave a drawing-room. A movement indicates our intention. But it is difficult for a shy person not to be abrupt over the telephone. We should acquire a sort of light and prolonged manner of saying "good-bye."

Advice to a Young Man.

I watched you during that party. You were sad and annoyed with yourself. Though you sat next to that woman you like, you remained silent. She tried to put you at your ease, then, surprised, she

rose, murmuring that she must go. You found her an hour later, bright and happy, beside another man.

You joined the political group. They were talking on subjects with which you are familiar: war, taxes, business depression. They said nothing that was not printed every morning in the newspapers, yet their conversation seemed animated and witty. You wished to take part in it. They turned toward you in astonishment, as a good orchestra might look upon a violinist who played off key. You began to speak. After two sentences, the man with the loud voice, interrupted you, and no one asked you to finish what you had begun.

You were afraid to be the first to leave, but you went after the first person had gone. You walked slowly, with hanging head. I felt like going to you and saying: "Be not troubled. Your experience tonight was the same as I once had. Think not that your silence was noticed. Men are too busy with themselves to think of you long. Now you envy their self-confidence. You will have it too. This is acquired through achievement and the lack of a critical attitude. As you grow older things will come to you. You will learn to assert yourself. You will have a doctrine—a strong armor whose protection will make you brave. Meanwhile, you

should practise a few rules of temporary caution.

"Be silent when you come into a new world for the first time. Listen to what is being said. Seek your own level. In Paris there are but three subjects of conversation possible at the same time. Study them as though you were preparing questions on history for an examination. Then watch for your chance. In matters of fact, competency gives you the right to interfere. Be a theologian, a psychologist, a jurist. Quote the laws of excommunication, and articles of the Civil Code. The world respects specialists.

"With women, be simple and fearless. They like men to be natural and to tell them about themselves. Do not hesitate to describe the trade in which you are engaged. Man's activity, to them, is like the rough touch of a loving hand, and they find it sweet. Do not fear, even, to be obscure. They will say of you: 'That is the young man who has attractive eyes and who spoke to me of Einstein.'"

In a rather large gathering a woman can do much to reassure, with a glance, a tender and uneasy friend. It is like a smile which passes through her eyes, then flits over to rest on a quietened soul.

The Banquet.

Conversation at the table was doubtless more solemn with the Greeks than it is with us. In Plato's "Banquet" the guests eat before they begin to talk. Then the physician Eryximachus proposes a subject of conversation: "Each of the guests will improvise, as best he can, a eulogy on love. We will go round the table, starting from left to right."

When the cock crowed, Socrates was still talking and compelling the two men next to him to acknowledge the fact that it behooves the same man to be a tragic and a comic poet. It was broad daylight

when, having put them both to sleep, he went to the Lyceum to bathe.

Nowadays, who would shine at such long nocturnal pastimes?

Dinner.

"No less than the Graces, no more than the Muses," said Disraeli. I do not quite agree with him. Dinner for two is the most charming of all. The lack of an audience does away with vanity. In Paris, six or eight is the number most conducive to brilliant conversation. The guests are close enough to hear one another without raising their voices. From eight it is wise to skip to fourteen. Ten or twelve

are too noisy for one story to be heard by the entire table, and yet not enough so to make confidences possible. With fourteen to thirty guests, it is possible for couples to find solitude in the crowd.

Do not forget that the least attractive of the two women beside you may have a secret and charming soul.

It is difficult to switch conversation from right to left at full speed. You must let it subside imperceptibly into silence, then clear the way before you can turn to the other side.

There is no general conversation at a British dinner. You talk with your

neighbor, seldom beyond. It was not always so. In Dr. Johnson's time, conversation at the table was a contest from which one emerged victorious or vanquished. "But, Sir," said Boswell, "can there not be good conversation without fighting for the first place?" "Not bright conversation," said Johnson. Oscar Wilde was still able to silence a table of twenty in order to tell a story. There no longer is a man in England who would be permitted to have such genius. A too well turned phrase is deemed ridiculous, a quotation horrifying. This attitude is linked to a form of nonchalance which at present is shaping the literature and speech of that country. A useful reaction

against the pompous conventionality of the Victorian era. A new conventionality against which we shall soon want a reaction.

A Swedish Meal.

The master of the house taps twice on his glass—

My dear friends . . .

It is a solemn, humorous and charming little speech. Then the "skols" begin. "Skol" means to call one of the guests—Nils, Elsa, Gustav, by his or her name, giving him or her a long, tender glance; to raise one's glass to the third button of one's vest; to drink, as one continues to

look into that person's eyes, and at last to put the glass down after casting a last glance which should contain, if possible, a supreme trace of emotion. "Skol" means—"Nils, I think of you . . . Thus we commune better than with words . . . We understand each other . . . Nils, it is sweet to drink together." It is a toast, but it is much more than a toast. It is more complex. The two persons who participate in it must drink the same wine. A superior must first say "skol" to an inferior. No one says it to the hostess who, on the contrary, says it to everybody. Yes, it is much more than a toast, it is a psychological toast, two souls who drink

to one another's health, two hearts dipped in the same sweet beverage.

"That's what it is, isn't it?" I asked the man next to me. "My interpretation of what you, Swedes, think at such a time, is proper?"

"But no," said the man cynically. "I simply think that I am thirsty."

Conversation As a Game

PLEASURE in conversation does not spring from ideas which are always weaker than in a good written work, but rather from a swiftness in expressing ourselves and in understanding one another, from an equality of heart and mind where we enjoy at once our own brilliancy and that of others, from a common taste for perfect nuances which prompts us to look for still subtler ones and to find them.

Conversation as a game is a work of art. It requires the sacrifice of ideas. A passionate man always spoils such conversation. He gravely refutes light arguments;

he pursues forsaken themes. The rule is to accept all the movements of the ball and to follow it without regret. Still, certain passions are entertaining. But that is because their violence is feigned. They burst out at the highest pitch of a movement as drums or cymbals. Then the good instrumentalist keeps his thundering noise down, his eyes fixed upon the score.

There are born contradictors who always look for errors in what has just been said. This is an insufferable attitude. Conversation is an edifice which we must build together. Speakers must place their words, as masons their stones, think-

ing of the effect as a whole. Minds which follow a system must be avoided except when they attain the paradoxical.

In conversation as a game, the best qualities of the mind—withholding of judgment, moderation, modesty—become obstacles. This type of conversation demands rather mad boldness and a well defined personality.

Conversation requires our undivided attention. Most men are absent from themselves.

Whoever still argues at forty has never loved truth.

Women's thoughts obey the same laws as do the molecules of gases. They go with much rapidity in an initial direction, until a shock sends them into another, then a second shock into a third direction. It is useless to choose a theme with women. One must follow the hunt and jump everything.

A first conversation is never more than mere reconnoitering. One must study the map of a mind before one can move through it.

Conversation, as the giant of the fable, always needs to come back to earth. After an abstract phrase, examples are

required. Thus there can be pleasant dialogue only between people who know the same men, the same books. The more the members of a group see one another, the more pleasure it gives them. Hence the charm of schools, of barracks, of the Verdurin Salon.

Take the most brilliant Parisian conversationalist to a small town, and he will bore people.

"The true artist," said Stevenson, "follows the course of conversation as the fisherman that of a river, without stopping where there is nothing to catch."

In a milieu which is not yours and

whose secrets you do not know, you will do well to carry the conversation toward metaphysical heights. For there, the guide with a steady pike becomes the master of those proud strangers whose self-respect will prevent always from asking to turn back.

In Paris a story must be brief. Statesmen, Ministers, Admirals, Generals, Ambassadors, literary men who have arrived, and two or three professional conversationalists, alone have the right to talk more than five minutes. In country towns Prefects and Colonels replace Ministers and Generals. In foreign countries there is no time limit.

Boylesve writes in his diary: "He who takes cognizance of others no longer talks well; he expresses and distorts himself after their image; he betrays himself by using a language which is not quite his own." Thus the conversation of a great conversationalist is almost always a monologue. Madame de Noailles talks to the stars; Cocteau to the shadows; Valery talks to what Valery will be.

The great conversationalist thinks aloud in direct contact with himself. Leaning over an inner abyss, he describes what he sees there.

The oratorical tone will out in a politician, a lecturer, even in everyday life.

CONVERSATION

A well-bred man keeps his beliefs out of his conversation.

The shape of furniture is not without influence on the quality of conversation. Large English armchairs are suitable to silent drowsiness; stiff-backed seats make one witty. Sofas on which one can lie are conducive to more intimate chats; because eyes do not meet, shyness is obliterated, and the nearness of stretched bodies evokes sensual remembrances.

"In my drawing-room," says S . . . "I always put the armchairs in groups of three. Two is dangerous. The unfortunate one whom chance has placed be-

side a boring woman is unable to escape, and the couple who want a quiet retreat always have enough energy to eliminate a third party."

It long was my belief that inasmuch as the conversation of a technician had revealed the Stock Exchange to me, that of another technician, political life, and still that of a third, chemistry—so one day a few words from a philosopher would bring me the meaning of life.

A drawing-room must be large enough for two groups to be able to talk about one another without being heard.

I like what Madame de Sévigné used

to call "infinite" conversations where we talk of ourselves, of others, of little happenings, of nothing, without flash, fearless of silence, confidently and with abandon.

My taste for the serious prompts me to find most pleasure in talking with children.

Action In Conversation

ONE must not believe that business is handled as a mathematical operation. A mediocre but wilful man will compel an intelligent but weak-minded man to sign a dangerous deed even though the latter know it means his ruin.

In conversation, as in war, it is sufficient to hold out fifteen minutes longer than one's opponent. Tenaciousness outweighs reason, eloquence, science. It reduces to silence through boredom.

A good argument too often repeated loses its strength. It seems that the mind,

like the blood, produces antitoxin and can be rendered immune even to evidence.

When conversation must end in a decision, the value of the arguments is less important than the order in which they are presented. Surprise is necessary, as in a fight.

Most men are still more lazy than ambitious. Hence the success of fools.

The difficult part in an argument is not to defend one's opinion but rather to know it.

"It happens," said Paulhan, "that certain wise opinions 'do not take' and leave

no trace. To say that people do not heed them is putting it mildly. It would seem they do not even hear them. This may be due to some defect on the part of the person who expresses them—for instance to his shyness. Thus a Madagascan proverb states that were an orphan to utter the truest things he would not be understood. That is because he is deprived of the self-confidence which parental affection gives us." Quite true. And so it is also that people listen admiringly to banal, even absurd ideas, when the person who propounds them is considered an expert. Were a simpleton an economist his opinions would be in the front pages.

In the world, as in the theatre, it is useful to have a well-defined job. The public needs to know whether it must laugh or admire.

The commonplace utterances of the professional person have a charm which others do not possess. We hear him patiently state the most elemental truths which would not be tolerated had we said them ourselves.

The voice must be all the softer as the resolve is the firmest, and a smile can tone down pleasantly the violence of contradiction.

To begin to expose firmly the opponent's point of view, is already to take away much of its strength.

Experience procures no pleasure except that of passing it on.

In diplomatic conversation it is important to shield yourself behind the very principles of your opponent, so that there be no room left for sophistry.

There are feints in conversation as in fencing, and a cool-headed man can well afford to expose himself a second that he may compel his opponent to show his game.

I know myself to be so easily convinced that no argument ever convinces me.

With certain men there seems to be no connection between their opinions and their decisions. They yield on every point. They grant everything: "You are quite right." The matter seems settled. At the last moment, however, you will notice that they have not given in one inch and that everything is pending anew.

Self-confidence lies either in a certain slowness of speech, or in a quiet strength, always in the assurance of being heeded. Words flow from the speaker and fall with all their weight. The man lacking in confidence always appears to withhold

his words and to take them back; he is ashamed of his utterances before he has finished them.

One could write the equation thus: age + volume of voice = a constant. Infants in swaddling clothes and young preachers howl to make themselves heard; old men who have no voice left impel people to listen to them.

There is in hesitancy of speech, and even in stuttering, a modesty which greatly pleases an English audience. "Learn how to stutter," said an old Minister to a newcomer to the House of Commons.

Wit

TO be witty is not enough. One must possess sufficient wit to avoid having too much of it.

In matters of wit, as in gambling, you must withdraw from the game before your opponent has a chance to come back. You cannot win long. Talleyrand was witty once a day.

As the humorous springs from contrast, so it is easy to be funny when one is considered serious. A priest, a minister, a scholar, are witty at little cost; the audience puts to their credit the restraint which they spare.

Nothing is more surprising but more delicious to a young man than to discover in an old man perfect youthfulness of mind.

Before he is six years old or after he is seventy, man has the right to be natural; the cynicism of old men is as exquisite as the frankness of children.

It is easy to laugh at ourselves in small things when we admire ourselves in big things. Hence the perfect sense of humour of the English.

The English, since Wilde, have found the secret of making the paradoxical commonplace.

To be witty at our own expense is a sure means of making ourselves attractive to people. But is that really honest? The most modest man I knew was also the most vain.

"He always lies," said someone of F . . . "But I don't care, he is always entertaining at the table."

Walpole said of Marshal de Richelieu: "One laughs before knowing what he says, which is right, for surely one would not laugh after." This can apply to most professional wits.

Anecdotes are so rare that centuries pass them on. "Don't tell me what the

end is like," was said in 1880 of the woman who was reading "The Life of Jesus"; in 1925 of the woman who attended the play "Saint Joan."

"Nothing is clearer proof of weakness of mind than a taste for anecdotes."—This maxim is that of a man with a poor memory.

An anecdote must be introduced at the very moment it illustrates that which has just been said. The pointless anecdote is offensive.

Rivarol used to prepare in bed in the morning his extemporaneous speeches for the evening. He would write his

epigrams on cards which he stuck into the frames of his mirrors, and would learn them while shaving.

"There never have been more than three extemporaneous speakers," said Mr. Emile Olivier: "Lamartine, Thiers and myself. None of the three ever extemporized."

Why do we claim that beautiful women are seldom witty? They have, at their service, to shape their minds, the most outstanding men.

Coarseness is the wit of fools and contradiction their subtlety.

In a written story, too brilliant an ending may annoy delicate minds, but conversation being of the theatre, a curtain is required.

It is difficult to create ideas and easy to create words; hence the success of philosophers.

Never finish at any cost an anecdote, a speech, which was interrupted by someone's arrival or departure. To pick up ideas that have dropped is miserliness of mind.

Silence

OFTEN the same secret and dangerous thought crosses the minds of two persons as they talk. Each one knows that the other is dwelling on that thought. Yet they do not speak of it, and the troublesome idea withdraws softly, such as those strains of music which come forward, then recede and die, while the musicians remain unseen. There are spoken silences.

A conversation devoid of silences produces nothing. There must be a gestation period.

The truly accomplished hostess is not

concerned over a silence. She greets it and makes it amiable.

She who fears a scene of love or jealousy must avoid silences. They are conducive to the forming of resolutions, and the length of the pause favors a change of tone without dissonance.

What men call "chattering" in women is often nothing but modesty.

Men fear silence as they fear solitude, because both give them a glimpse of the terror of life's nothingness.

When her drawing-room becomes empty, she suddenly sees death. (Lacretelle.)

Schumann, having taken a woman for a boat ride and having in two hours' time, not uttered a single word, said to her as they parted: "How well we understood each other today!"

A young man may, without appearing ridiculous, remain silent during an entire evening if the one phrase which he has spoken is brilliant or delicate.

Barrès used to say: "The evenings I feel incapable of intelligence, I pretend to be bored."

Boldness in love must be acted, not spoken. Gestures are less frightening than words. Silence protects purity and keeps things on an intellectual plane.

CONVERSATION

It is delicious when, two silences having travelled along parallel roads in the shadows, both minds suddenly reappear side by side in the daylight with the same phrase. Thus sometimes a powerful rhythm beats silently for the listener throughout a long musical pause, and pleasure is found in the fact that resumption of the music springs from one's imagination at the same time as from the orchestra.

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